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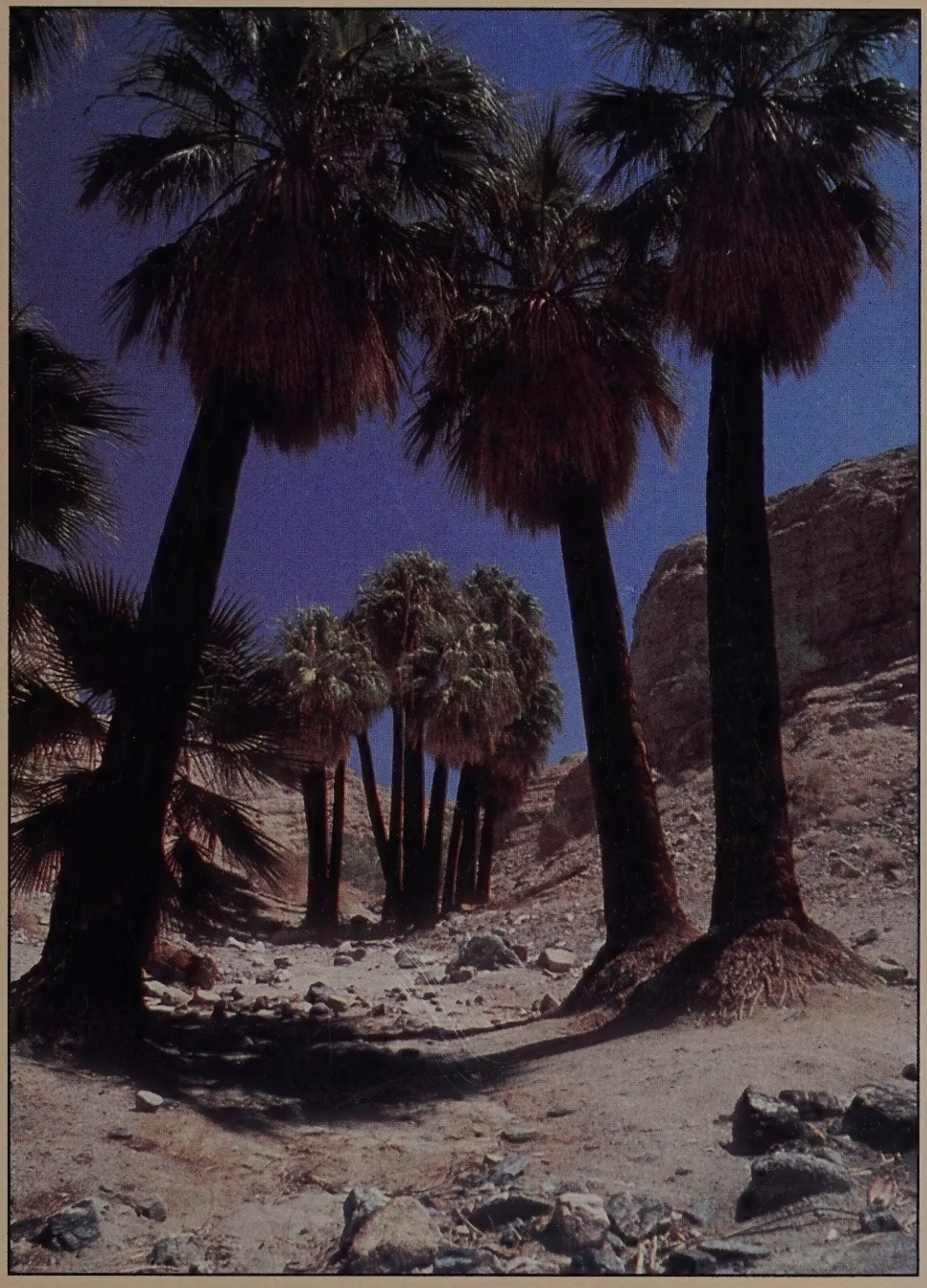
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
CALIFORNIA

DESERT CONSERVATION
A MANAGEMENT SHOWCASE



Hidden Springs Oasis in Mecca Hills

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W E L C O M E . . .

The Kelso Dunes feature unique flora and fauna like the evening primrose and the highest concentration of magnetite in any dune system in the world.

... to the California Desert Conservation Area!

Vast sandscapes, rugged canyon gorges, unusual wildlife, and swaying palms meld together here, creating a distinctive beauty for all Americans to enjoy. Yet the California Desert offers far more than scenic beauty, for it is a source of natural, historic, recreational and economic riches. From cryptic petroglyphs to shifting sand dunes, multi-million dollar gold mines to majestic bighorn sheep, ribbons of pipelines to wide open spaces, the California Desert is of great importance to millions of southern California residents and, indeed, to all Americans.

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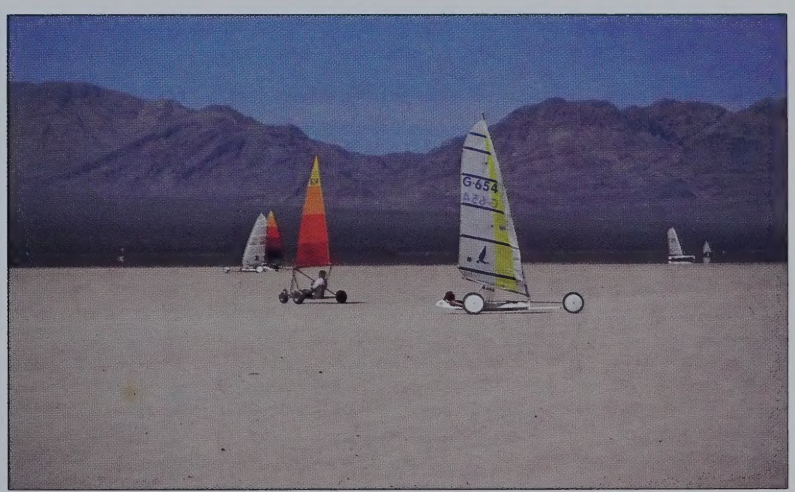
Designated by Congress as a National Conservation Area, this 25 million-acre expanse covers most of southeastern California — almost a quarter of the entire state. Nearly half of its acreage is a desert conservation showcase managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).



Landsailors from around the world visit California to challenge its desert winds.

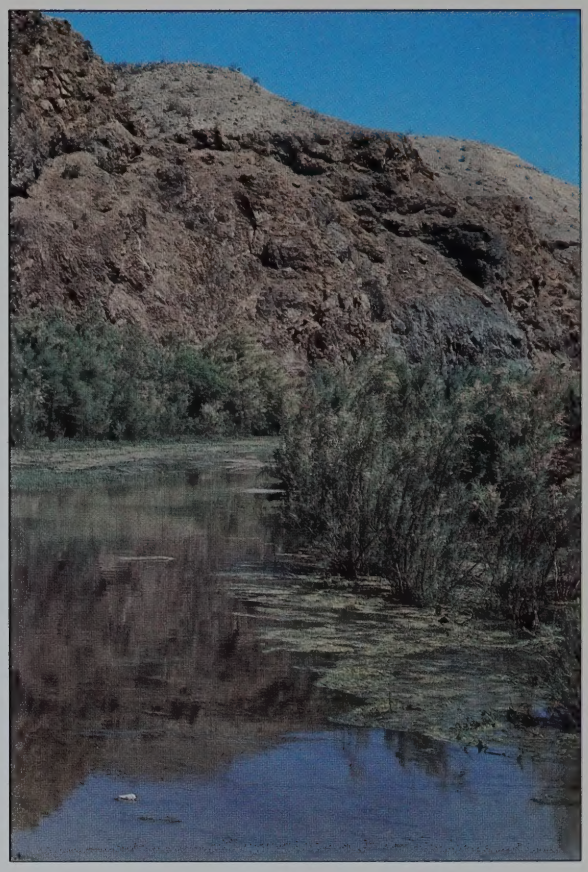
To meet the challenges of managing such a diversity of resources in a region of intense population pressures, BLM completed the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan in 1980. The plan, developed with extensive public involvement, balances the needs for protecting resource values with those for wise use.

With the desert conservation plan as its blueprint, BLM has significantly increased its ability to protect and manage the Public Lands through expanded ranger and scientific staffs. In the last decade, interpretive and public education programs grew, and protection of special values was enhanced. Significant progress was made in maintaining and improving the diversity and quality of recreational opportunities for the desert's 16 million annual visitors because of the plan.

Under the plan, other uses such as livestock grazing and mining have been authorized within strictly enforced environmental prescriptions and monitoring by BLM. Major compliance has been achieved through education and cooperation with federal and state agencies, user and environmental groups, and the visiting public.

As part of California's last frontier, many areas of the desert are being protected by BLM for possible "wilderness" designation by Congress.

While the word "desert" usually brings to mind images of vast, contiguous expanses of sand, a wide variety of vegetation actually flourishes within the California Desert Conservation Area. From the common creosote bush to an ancient stand of bristlecone pine, this vegetation furnishes food and shelter for equally varied wildlife populations.



Afton Canyon is managed for low-impact recreational use compatible with wildlife and scenic values. Its cottonwoods and willows, rugged mountains and Mojave River host birds and bighorn sheep.

Each year, hundreds of elementary school students in southern California have the chance to learn about their environment through BLM's outdoor classroom program.

California's State reptile, the desert tortoise, may be one of its most famous wildlife residents, but the California Desert is also home for many others, among them lizards, deer, migratory birds, kangaroo rats, bighorn sheep, and even several species of fish!

Domestic cattle and sheep have grazed the area since the 1890s. And wild horses and burros — descendants of the Old West — still roam freely in the region.

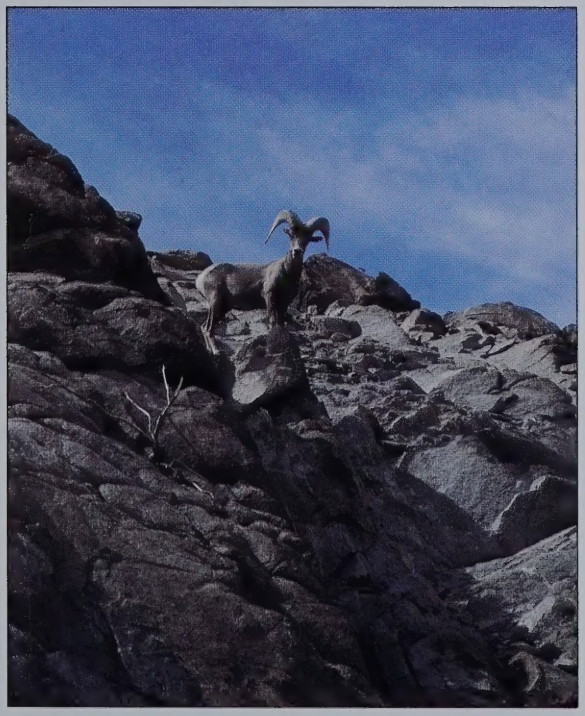
The California Desert is one of the most highly mineralized regions in the nation. Today's miners use advanced technologies to collect microscopic gold, rare earths, sodium, borates, phosphates, sand and gravel, and other important resources for our everyday lives.

A Native American petroglyph, or ancient rock drawing. BLM protects thousands of cultural sites and artifacts that span thousand of years of human history.

The extremes of the desert climate have actually protected historic and cultural remains from their earlier residents. Indian rock art, Native American larger-than-life designs etched into the earth, the wooden Plank Road used by pioneers, and skeletons of historic mining towns are some of the riches you will encounter in the California Desert.

Within the desert plan, corridors for oil and gas pipelines, electrical lines, water canals, and fiber optic cables required to support the metropolitan areas of southern California were established. Because of these rights-of-way, vital services can be provided while their impacts are confined to specified areas.

The desert is a backyard playground for southern California's 18 million residents. Pitch a tent in the wilds (or in a campground), sail down a sand dune or across a dry lake bed, bump along a historic trail, hike to a desert waterfall, search for gemstones, capture on film the antics of desert wildlife, or ride off into the sunset on your horse — there's something for everyone in the California Desert.



Over the past decade, BLM habitat management and volunteer help has doubled bighorn sheep populations from 2,000 to 4,000.

California's Desert Showcase

R E C R E A T I O N

Big Morongo Canyon exemplifies cooperative management among BLM, The Nature Conservancy, county government and others for wildlife and visitor enjoyment.

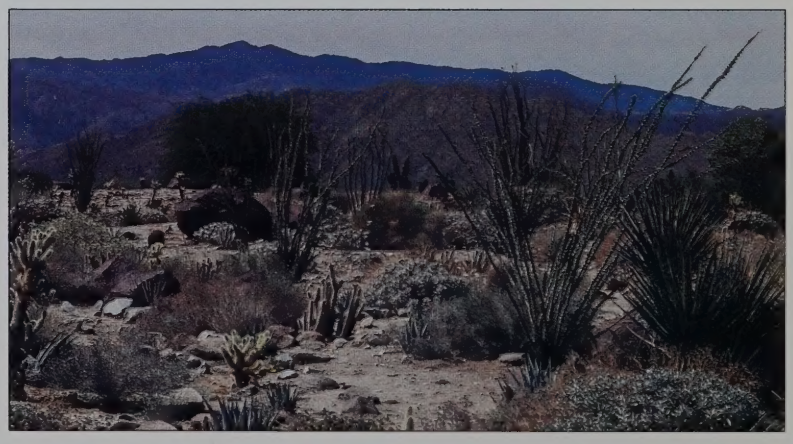
The California Desert is truly a showcase, one with hundreds of unique and intriguing places. These Public Lands offer a great diversity of recreational opportunities, including exploring, camping, hiking, rockhounding, photographing nature, and just plain relaxing!

America's first National Scenic Area, the East Mojave, encompasses 1.5 million acres of Public Lands between the Nevada border and Barstow. Visitors can still witness a cattle roundup and see historic as well as modern mining operations in this area, managed to maintain its Old West character. You can clamber through the rock formation called "Hole-in-the-Wall"; traverse the historic Mojave Road in the footsteps of Indians, soldiers, and homesteaders; camp among the pinyons and junipers at Mid Hills; or drive the newly designated network of Back Country Byways.

Geologic features such as Cima Dome, the Cinder Cones, and the "booming" Kelso Dunes add to the appeal of the East Mojave. Bighorn sheep flourish in the Old Dad Mountains; desert tortoises lumber across the floors of the scenic area's valleys, and petroglyphs decorate the walls of many canyons.

Near the Salton Sea is Dos Palmas, an island of biological richness where the endangered pupfish and Yuma clapper rail dwell. Once a stop on the Butterfield stagecoach route, and later a popular get-away for Hollywood moguls, this peaceful site still offers the weary traveler spiritual refreshment amidst artesian springs and rustling palms.

Rising near the shoreline of ancient Lake Cahuilla, the Imperial Sand Dunes reach 300 feet into the sky and stretch more than 40 miles along the eastern edge of the Imperial Valley. Renowned as the ultimate off-highway vehicle playground, the dunes play host to up to 40,000 riders on holiday weekends.



Santa Rosa Mountains National Scenic Area attracts naturalists, hikers, and photographers for its wildlife, open space and wilderness values.

World War II veterans, volunteers, and BLM cooperated to protect General Patton's desert training sites. Thousands visit the museum at Chiriaco Summit each year, and remnants such as this altar used by troops remain on Public Lands.

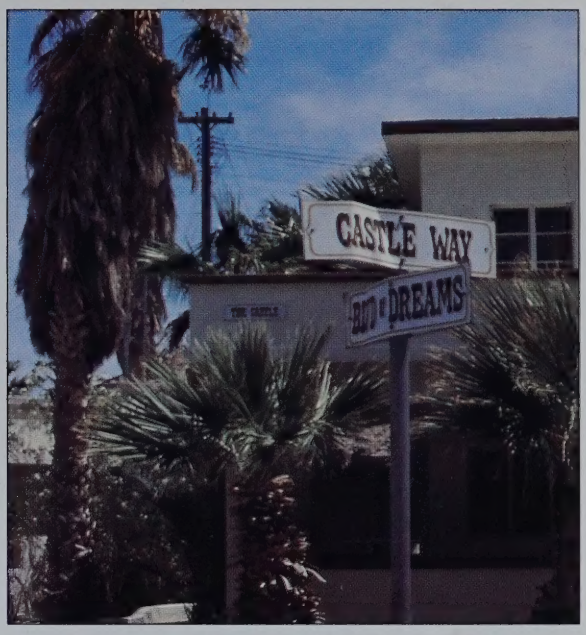
Visitors also hike and explore undisturbed dunes, watch fascinating wildlife scurry across the hot sands, and discover vestiges of the historic Plank Road, built around the turn of the century to help adventuresome travelers cross the dunes.

Thanks to the cooperative efforts of many agencies and local citizens, the Santa Rosa Mountains National Scenic Area was created in 1990 to recognize and preserve its outstanding scenic, wildlife, recreational, open space, and wilderness values.

The Santa Rosas' striking vertical relief, with many prominent, sharply defined mountain peaks, creates a near-perfect backdrop for the communities of the Coachella Valley. Endangered species like the desert slender salamander and peninsular bighorn sheep make their home here along with more then 500 species of plants. The area also provided sustenance for Native Americans for thousands of years, and remains a sacred area.

Today, the Santa Rosas offer wilderness solitude for the hiker as well as abundant opportunities for other low-impact recreational activities like bird watching, nature study, horseback riding, and photography.

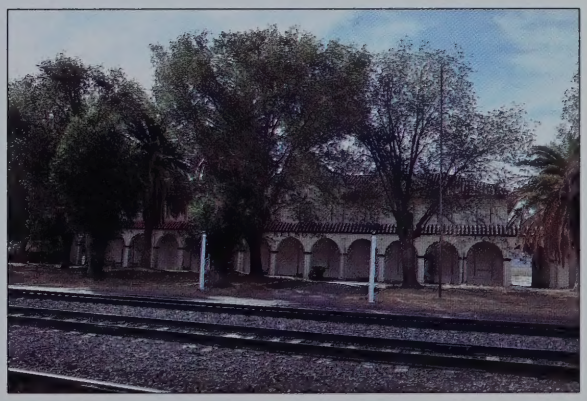
Between 1942-44, more than one million American soldiers trained for World War II in the deserts of California and Arizona.



Soda Springs, now home of the California State University Desert Studies Center, served as a watering stop for Indians, explorers and settlers.

Tent cities and support facilities sprang up across 18,000 square miles seemingly overnight, and were disassembled just as quickly.

Although wind and storms have erased almost all evidence of this massive occupation, a few historical remnants survive and have been preserved. Rock-lined walkways and insignia, stone altars, giant relief maps, and hundreds of miles of tank tracks portray the story of Major General George S. Patton's Desert Training Center. The General George S. Patton Memorial Museum at Chiriaco Summit commemorates this interesting era in desert history.



Historic Kelso Depot, in the East Mojave National Scenic Area, is maintained by volunteers from the Kelso Depot Fund, including ranchers, miners, residents of the area, and BLM employees.

MINERALS/ENERGY

Big turbines harness powerful hot desert winds and provide electrical power as an alternative energy source for thousands of Californians.

The California Desert is one of the most highly mineralized regions in the nation. The known mineral reserves remain highly significant; and, although much of it has never been fully explored, the geologic make-up of the desert indicates substantial potential mineral resources as well.

Maintaining our fast-paced lifestyle requires a tremendous amount of natural resources, especially minerals. Sand and gravel, rare earths, gold, and many other minerals are all mined in the desert.

The mine at Mountain Pass produces most of the free world's rare earths minerals used for superconductivity, defense materials, and as an activator for the red phosphor in color TV tubes.

The interest in mineral exploration and production in the desert remained high this past decade. More than 80,000 mining claims exist in the desert, and gold production is now estimated at 500,000 ounces per year.

Under the strictest conditions, BLM has managed the extraction of mineral resources, such as gold, from the desert. In many cases, the environmental conditions that must be met by private companies before operating on Public Lands have been deemed precedent-setting by state agencies and environmental groups.

Cooperation assures that natural values are preserved. Gold Fields' Mesquite Mine south of the Chocolate Mountains worked closely with BLM to protect cultural and environmental values. And, before BLM approved a Viceroy Gold mining operation at Castle Mountain, the company cooperated on extensive environmental measures. To protect the threatened desert tortoise, Viceroy Gold agreed to locate project facilities away from areas of high tortoise density, relocate tortoises found on the site, fence the site preventing other tortoises from wandering into the construction area, and use van and bus pools for workers to reduce traffic through tortoise habitat. To compensate for habitat lost on the project site, Viceroy will acquire more than 700 acres of private lands containing valuable tortoise habitat in the eastern Mojave, so that it subsequently can be managed by BLM to benefit tortoise populations.

In addition, Viceroy will use an enclosed pipeline system, steel storage tanks, and drip irrigation to virtually eliminate the exposure of wildlife to cyanide solutions used in the gold extraction process.

Reclamation measures include revegetation of disturbed areas, salvage of native plant species, and development of a research and monitoring program.

Geothermal production has expanded significantly in the desert with construction at East Mesa in Imperial County and at Coso in southeastern Inyo County. When all the geothermal plants in the desert are on-line, enough geothermal energy will be produced to supply the power needs of 200,000 people. This alternative energy source is environmentally safe and has eliminated the consumption of millions of barrels of oil over the past decade. BLM conducts numerous lease inspections regularly to verify production, ensure compliance, and enforce safety requirements at geothermal sites.

Alternative energy production includes some 3,000 high-tech wind turbines, supplying pollution-free energy for southern California. BLM leases public lands for harnessing the wind's energy and receives $1 million annually in rents and royalties for the federal treasury.

Geothermal production in the desert currently supplies power to satisfy the needs of 130,000 people. The East Mesa region is one of two major geothermal production areas in southern California.

NATURAL AREAS

Along the Mojave Road travelled by early American explorers, Fort Piute was constructed and manned by the U.S. Army from 1866-1877. Part of the East Mojave National Scenic Area, Fort Piute is a BLM Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC).

More than six million acres, half of the Public Lands in the desert, were studied by BLM for their wilderness potential because of their scenic values, solitude, naturalness, and geological, ecological, scientific, educational and historic features.

The desert hosts yet another variety of areas, also aggressively managed by BLM to ensure their special values. Currently, 80 Public Land areas — over 650,000 acres — are protected and managed as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs).

Each of the desert's 80 ACECs is unique and contributes to a mosaic of unusual characteristics displaying California's tremendous natural and cultural diversity. Included among them are marsh habitats such as Harper Dry Lake in San Bernardino County; it provides a winter haven for large numbers of raptors, shorebirds, and waterfowl. The Coachella Valley Preserve system in Riverside county contains not only rare blow sand habitat for the threatened Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard, but also desert oases critical to songbirds.

The Piute Creek ACEC near Needles displays an unusual mix of wildlife, cultural, and recreational values. Piute Spring is one of the East Mojave's few streams which flow year-round. The stream and adjacent cottonwood and willow thickets provide crucial habitat for resident wildlife and migratory songbirds.

This water also draws human beings. Throughout the area numerous petroglyphs or rock art created by prehistoric Native Americans tell a story that modern mankind has yet to fully understand. The area also encompasses Fort Piute, built in the 1860s as a major outpost on the Mojave Road.

The unique qualities of Piute Creek and other ACECs make them highly attractive to visitors. Managing this recreational demand has been an important priority for BLM throughout the desert to ensure protection of the cultural and wildlife values.

With the help of Congress and major constituency groups, BLM has been able to increase its number of desert rangers in the past decade from 17 to 60. Expanded desert ranger patrols during key use periods have reduced vandalism and theft of California's unique riches.

BLM has prepared an individual management plan for each ACEC that sets out how the area's special values will be protected and managed.

Saline Valley, a wilderness study area, contains desert iguana, the American bittern, grey fox, Native American artifacts, and outstanding scenery for backcountry hikers.

R A N G E L A N D S

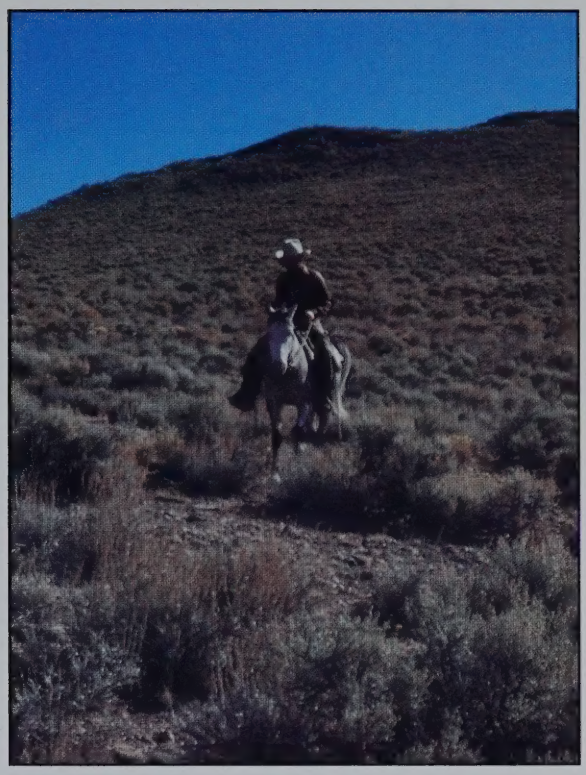
The desert rangelands are home to many wildlife species such as bighorn sheep, as well as wild horses and burros and domestic livestock such as cows and sheep. Ranchers pay a fee based on a Congressionally established formula for the privilege of grazing on public range.

Strict guidelines exist for grazing. BLM assures environmental and modern management practices to provide for the needs of wildlife and domestic livestock.

With the assistance of grazing experts, BLM decides how much forage animals can eat from the desert range without causing damage. In the East Mojave National Scenic Area, the traditional activities of long-time ranchers have been occurring since the late 1800s. These ranching uses have become an important part of the scenery and recreational experience in the East Mojave.

BLM desert range management has focused on developing and maintaining riparian habitat in cooperation with the California Department of Fish and Game, the Wildlife Conservation Board, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Preservation of these habitats comes through closely managing the grazing of animals, using water conservation techniques, and controlling erosion.

Riparian habitat protection requires monitoring of the size and location of herd populations, such as wild burros, to limit the areas where they can graze. In the past decade, 20,000 excess wild burros were removed from the desert and adopted by the public through BLM's Adopt-A-Horse Program.



Ranching operations dating back to the 1800s are today run by fourth generation ranchers who help with land stewardship and wildlife water sources.

The desert oasis at Big Morongo Canyon is managed by BLM and The Nature Conservancy to promote the growth of a wide variety of plants, protect rare and endangered wildlife, provide for scientific research and offer educational and recreational opportunities.

This riparian oasis, where at least 235 species of birds have been observed, has gained a national reputation among birdwatchers. The area is important to migrating and breeding birds as well as mule deer and bighorn sheep. Raccoons, bobcats and foxes also rely on the habitat for food.

Other riparian habitats, such as Sand Canyon and the San Felipe-San Sebastian marsh, also are critical sources of water for endangered species, rare plants, and wildlife.

VEHICLE PLAY

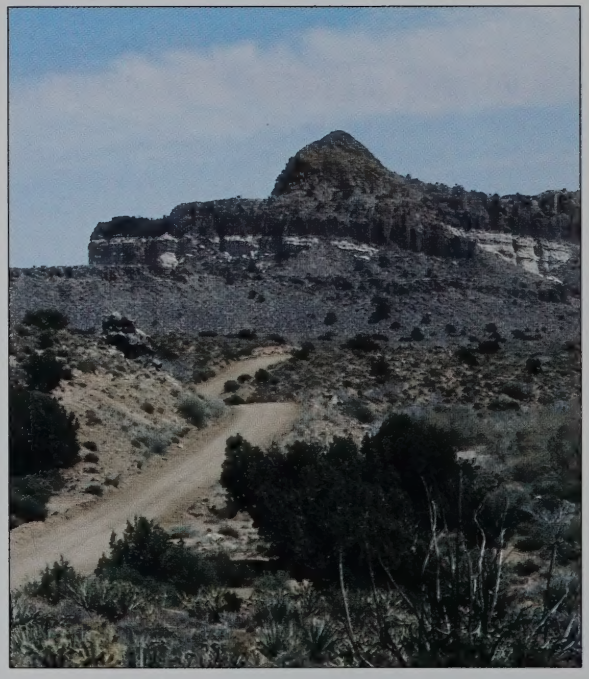
Off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation is currently and historically one of the most popular activities on Public Lands in the desert. BLM's focus with OHV use in the desert is to protect natural resources and promote public safety while allowing public enjoyment.

To minimize conflicts among the many users of the desert lands, BLM cooperates with many organizations through land-use planning and special public task forces to identify and agree upon routes of travel for vehicles and special areas for vehicle play. These task forces include environmental, wildlife, and recreation interests.

Those who enjoy roaming scenic country roads exploring little-known places have been excited by BLM's naming of Back Country Byways. Wildhorse Canyon, in San Bernardino County, was designated by the Secretary of the Interior as BLM's first Back Country Byway. By setting aside special routes, BLM meets the public's demand for pleasure driving, contributes to support of local economies, and increases appreciation of desert lands.

Two of the most popular desert routes for family OHV touring are the 130-mile Mojave Road, first established in the 1860s as a wagon trail, and the East Mojave Heritage Trail, a 660-mile four-wheel drive recreation trail. Both routes were developed by the Friends of the Mojave Road with BLM's help, and guidebooks interpreting their historic and natural features are available.

The ancient Mojave Indian trail connects Mojave villages along the Colorado River with the California coast across 130 miles of the East Mojave National Scenic Area. Today, families tour the Mojave Road once travelled by American mountain men Jedediah Smith and Kit Carson.



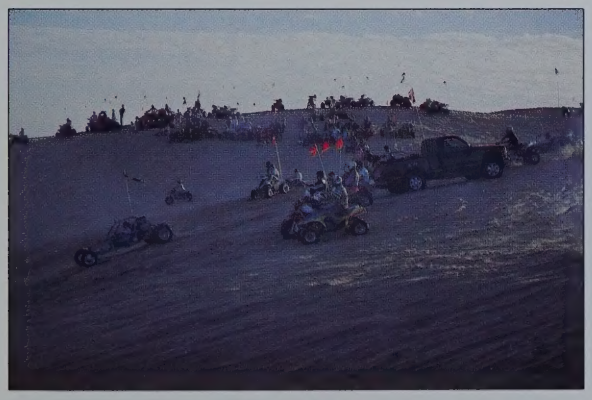
Wildhorse Canyon, first Back Country Byway dedicated by BLM, takes travelers past Wild Horse Mesa and the colorful volcanic formations of Hole-in-the-Wall and Lobo Point in the heart of the East Mojave National Scenic Area.

An important part of managing BLM's OHV program in the desert has been the designation of special areas such as the El Mirage Recreation Area. More than 100,000 people from southern California annually enjoy recreational activities here including OHV riding.

Today some 17 designated areas on desert lands in California offer outstanding opportunities for OHV use. These areas, approximately 500,000 acres of the 12.1 million acres under BLM jurisdiction in the desert, are actively managed to enhance OHV recreational play experiences and enjoyment as well as to provide for resource protection. This management concept of directing hundreds of thousands of southern California recreational vehicle users to specific sites for vehicle play has protected millions of other desert acres for wildlife and native plants.

Resource protection and visitor assistance, major priorities in desert management, were significantly expanded from the late 1970s to 1990 by more than doubling the number of desert rangers from 17 to 60.

A popular recreation area, El Mirage attracts landsailing, gyrocopter and glider flying, dune buggies and model airplane and rocket flying. Many movies and TV commercials have been shot here.



Hundreds of thousands of dune riders visit the Imperial Sand Dunes every year, making it the most intensively used off-highway vehicle recreational area in the California Desert.

Outside of these designated areas, vehicles are limited to approved routes of travel. This network of existing roads and trails provides access to desert wonders that otherwise might be beyond the reach of most visitors.

BLM, along with the U.S. Forest Service, has founded a nationwide educational program called "TREAD Lightly!" a cooperative initiative encouraging visitors to respect all natural resources on their Public Lands. In California, organizations, clubs, manufacturers, schools, volunteers and others carry the message to visitors that they need to take responsibility for the desert's fragile riches.

W I L D L I F E

The Coachella Valley Preserve near Palm Springs protects threatened Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizards who rely on free-blowing sand dunes for their habitat.

The desert is home to a large and diverse number of wildlife such as the bighorn sheep in the Old Dad Mountains, the Mohave tui chub at Soda Springs, the fringe-toed lizard in the Coachella Valley, the desert tortoise in Chuckwalla Bench, and the 200-plus species of birds in Big Morongo Canyon.

Considerable progress has been made in improving and expanding habitat on Public Lands in the desert for wildlife and fisheries. The Desert Tortoise and Chuckwalla Bench Natural Areas are two critical wildlife management areas where densities of desert tortoises are among the highest in the southwestern United States. Aggressive acquisition of private properties and exclusion of incompatible uses within these two areas, and in other critical habitat areas, have been management priorities.

Currently, a respiratory disease and predation by ravens are two factors contributing to tortoise population declines. BLM research into these problems led to the recent listing of the species as threatened. As scientists seek to explain and control the problems, BLM is striving to reduce losses in the Desert Tortoise Natural Area and other important habitats.

Soda Springs, situated at the very end of the Mojave River Basin, is a precious and rare resource in the dry desert climate. The resident Mohave tui chub, a desert fish once thought to be extinct, now lives in Soda Springs' ponds. Soda Springs also attracts a wide variety of birds like eagles, hawks, owls, and herons. With BLM, the California State University System Desert Studies Center operates as a classroom for scientists and students.

More than 180 species of wildlife, plus 4 considered rare - including the Coachella round-tailed ground squirrel and the flat-tailed horned lizard - can be found at the fringe-toed lizard preserve in the Coachella Valley. The preserve serves as a cooperative model of wildlife management throughout the United States.

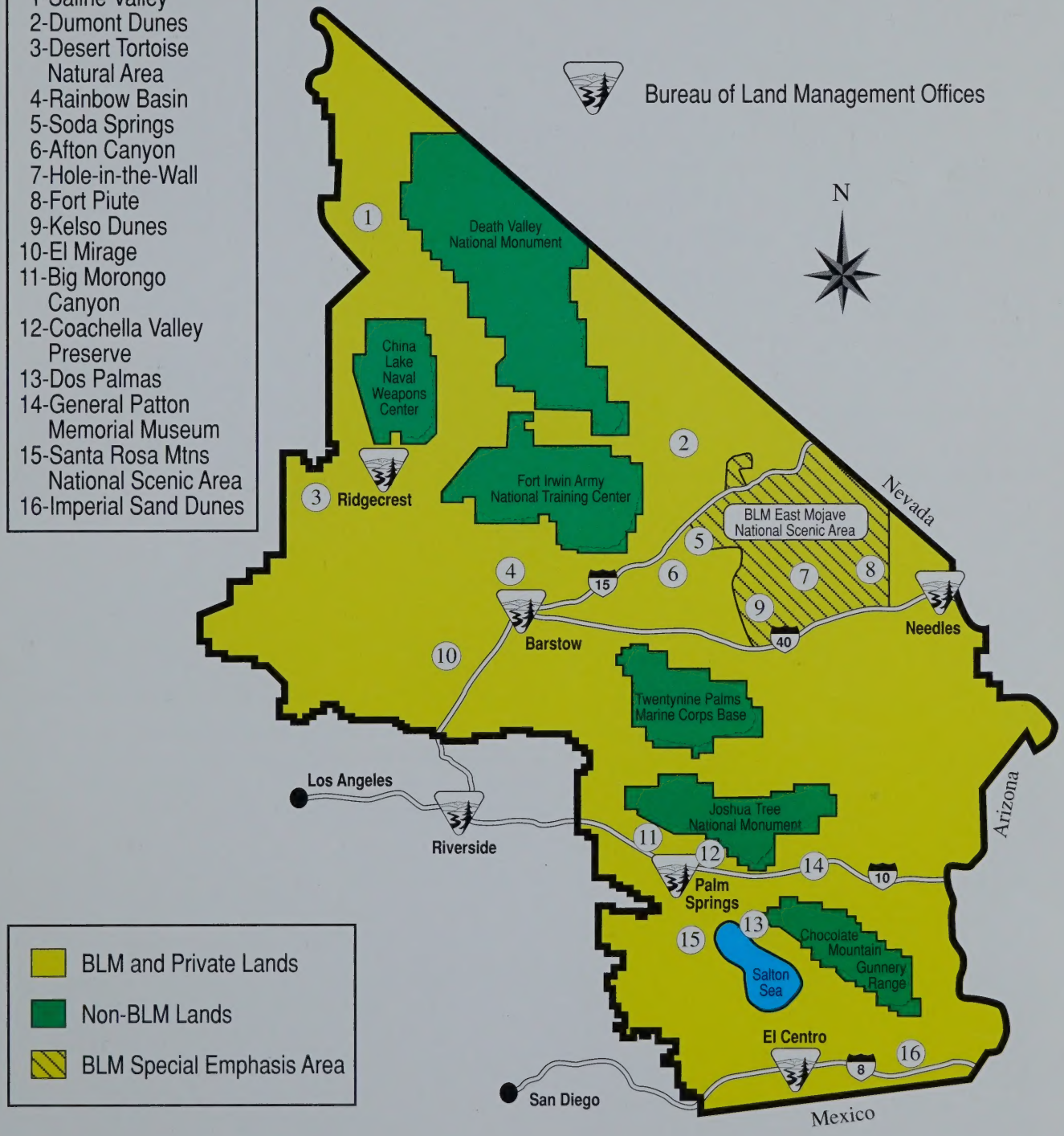
New initiatives include providing critical habitat for millions of migratory and wintering birds between California and Mexico, such as the joint venture by BLM, The Nature Conservancy and other agencies at the Dos Palmas project near the Salton Sea.

The Desert Tortoise Natural Area, a 25,000-acre preserve, welcomes visitors with a kiosk, hiking trails, and naturalist-led programs in the spring.

California Desert Conservation Area

Numbers in circles on map correspond to the list below:

1-Saline Valley
2-Dumont Dunes
3-Desert Tortoise Natural Area
4-Rainbow Basin
5-Soda Springs
6-Afton Canyon
7-Hole-in-the-Wall
8-Fort Piute
9-Kelso Dunes
10-El Mirage
11-Big Morongo Canyon
12-Coachella Valley Preserve
13-Dos Palmas
14-General Patton Memorial Museum
15-Santa Rosa Mtns National Scenic Area
16-Imperial Sand Dunes



Exploring the California Desert

Come explore California's desert showcase managed by BLM. The wide open spaces of the desert offer thousands of opportunities for you to enjoy your Public Lands.

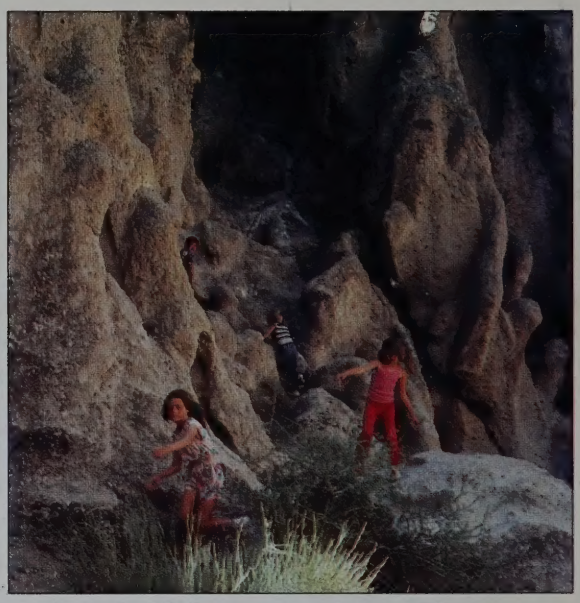
Many sites are managed to maintain their very remoteness and special character. Come discover the beauty of Saline Valley, the Eureka Dunes, Darwin Falls, or the Whipple Mountains.

Step back in history to the days of the Gold Rush, or experience the excitement of a free-spirited ride in a hang glider.

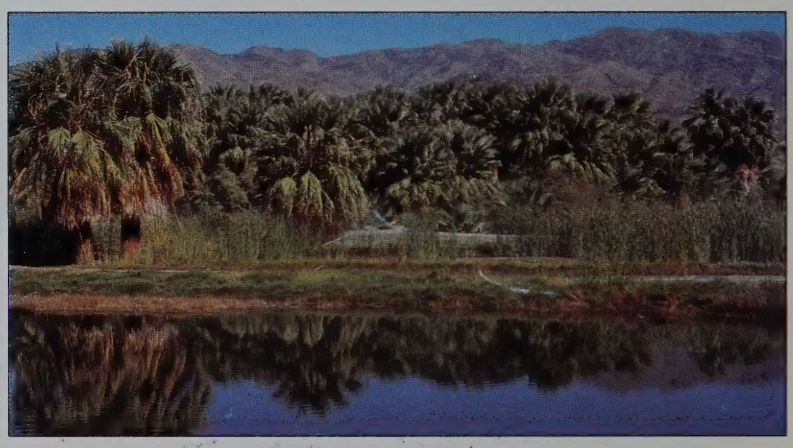
Visit the home of the desert tortoise, whose ancestors roamed the area millions of years ago; or wait quietly at a waterhole for the arrival of a bighorn sheep.

Escape the urban environment, come appreciate nature's beauty, explore remote canyons, discover a different way of life, and recreate your spirit.

Come see us!



Hole-in-the-Wall campground, named for its volcanic formations, lies in cowboy country with pole corrals, windmills, and loading chutes.



In many areas of the Coachella Valley, BLM and The Nature Conservancy work together to protect natural resources. Dos Palmas provides outstanding wetland wildlife habitat, the historic Butterfield stagecoach trail, and desert palm oases.

Joshua tree blossoms portray the dazzling beauty of the desert.

For more information:

Bureau of Land Management
California Desert District
6221 Box Springs Blvd.
Riverside, CA 92507-0714
1-800-446-6743

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